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SALT-2: The name of the game is high spy

By JOSEPH VOLZ

WASHINGTON—High above the Soviet Union, four United States spy satellites are on permanent station, watching for Russian missile tests.

Usually, two of the four Rhyolite satellites, hovering 22,000 miles up, are in operation at any one time. Their mission: To discover a Soviet missile blast-off within seconds and to identify the missile by using infrared sensors to detect the particular infrared "signature" of that weapon.

These spy satellites, along with land and sea-based radars, spy planes, ground listening devices and a few—very few—old fashioned human spies, make up the U.S. "verification" team. They will make sure that the Soviets do not cheat if the new strategic arms limitation treaty (SALT-2) is ratified by the Senate. The critics say our "spies" can't do the job well enough.

Disguise missile development

The Senate began hearings on the treaty last week, and one of the main points of the anti-SALT crowd was that the Soviets can disguise new missile development and upgrade their strategic missiles and bombers without the U.S. spies learning the first word in time to stop the violations.

The Carter administration is the first to publicly admit that the U.S. does have spy satellites, but Carter has ordered that little more be said publicly. No photos taken by U.S. spy satellites have ever been released.

Nevertheless, it is possible through interviews with people who have seen such photos, to put together a list of U.S. spy satellite accom-

the Soviet SS-9 missile warheads were being delivered to the silos in different containers, indicating the Soviets were putting multiple rather than single nuclear warheads on each missile.

• Photo satellites were the first to discover that the Soviets were building a new super submarine and a new mini-aircraft carrier. This was before the vessels were ready for sea trials. Apparently the satellites took pictures of shipyard activity and materials trucked into the yard.

• Central Intelligence Agency analysts concluded a few years ago, mainly on the basis of satellite data, that the Soviets did not have an operational antiballistic missile system for Moscow. The Russians had dug numerous ABM holes in an attempt to deceive the photo satellites.

• Through electronic communications intercepts by the National Security Agency of Soviet conversations, the U.S. reportedly discovered the Russian position on the SALT-1 talks. (SALT-1 was signed in 1972.)

The U.S. has about 50 spy satellites aloft—they have a six-month life span—compared with more than 260 for the Soviet Union. The "Big Bird" spy satellite—weighing 11 tons, compared with the first American spies in the sky 20 years ago, which weighed only 33 pounds—is the workhorse of the U.S. spy fleet.

Big Bird can take black and white, color or infrared television pictures and can take a clear picture of a 3-foot object from 100 miles up. That is, if it knows what it's looking for.

Can film large areas

To solve that problem, satellites flying at 200 miles up can film large

and presumably its Soviet counterpart—can photograph half of New England in one film clip.

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